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Written on JUNE 13, 2012 AT 8:00 AM by JWICK

New Clinical Support Tool Helps Treat Substance Use Disorders

Filed under FORCE HEALTH AND SAFETY, UNCATEGORIZED

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By Corina Notyce, DCoE Strategic Communications

To address the ongoing concern within the military about substance use disorders, a new tool kit is available to assist health care providers treating patients abusing alcohol or drugs. The “Substance Use Disorder Toolkit,” developed by U.S. Army Medical Command (MEDCOM), Department of Veterans Affairs and Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury ([DCoE](#)), ensures providers deliver evidence-based treatment consistent with the [Department of Veterans Affairs and Defense Department Clinical Practice Guideline](#). The tool kit also makes it easier for providers to share relevant information and resources to support recovery with patients and families.



To address the ongoing concern within the military about substance use disorders, a new tool kit is available to assist health care providers treating patients abusing alcohol or drugs. (U.S. Army photo by C. Todd)

“This tool kit is intended to be a useful, quick reference tool for primary care providers to maximize treatment efforts,” said Lt. Col. Philip Holcombe, DCoE subject matter expert on

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psychological health. “It provides an overview of best care practices, summarizes and highlights key areas providers need to cover in treatment, and includes easy-to-use reference cards providers can keep in the exam room to assist them with assessment and care.”

A 2008 survey of active-duty service members revealed that 20 percent of warriors drank heavily and abusively at least once within a 30-day period; heavy drinking is still problematic today. The reasons why service members and veterans turn to mood-altering substances (e.g., alcohol, prescription medicines, over-the-counter medications, steroids, dietary supplements and inhalants) vary significantly, but common reasons include social influence, recreation, loosening of inhibitions and stress relief.

“Studies and research are uncovering that combat exposure and deployment-related psychological stress are associated with an increase in frequency of heavy drinking and substance misuse behaviors,” said Lt. Cmdr. David Barry, DCoE subject matter expert on substance abuse. “Additionally, many service members and veterans turn to alcohol or drugs to overcome other psychological health problems or symptoms, such as sleep.”

Service members with substance abuse problems may experience multiple adverse consequences in their personal and professional lives. Substance use disorders may cause health, marital, legal and financial problems, as well as lead to emotional and physical abuse. For example, more than 50 percent of family abuse stems from substance abuse. To address this concern, one of the tool kit brochures entitled, “Substance Abuse Affects Families,” assists providers in educating family members about the family impacts of substance abuse.

To download a copy of the “Substance Use Disorder Toolkit” or to order a hard copy, visit dcoe.health.mil/SUDToolkit. Additional products complementing the tool kit are scheduled for future release.

For more clinical resources related to psychological health or traumatic brain injury prevention and care, visit the [Health Professionals](#) and [Resources](#) sections of the DCoE website.

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